

SAPTA SINDHVAS THE LAND OF SEVEN RIVERS

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A 803,940 sq. km piece of land on the surface of this earth, known politically as Pakistan since 14th August, 1947, has its root in antiquity. It stretches from the seashore to the loftiest mountain peaks, with mysterious Cholistan in between. Its fertile plains were not only the chosen land of the Central Asian Aryans, who 2500 years ago started settling in the land of Seven Rivers i.e. Sapta Sindhvas, but also of many other migrant races and tribes, who have spilled into Pakistan from the north-west, conquered the past conquerors and in turn were conquered by the future migrants. Its richness, fertility and vastness has absorbed all, who today form an amalgam of 135 million people.

The Sapta Sindhvas, or 'seven rivers', as given in the Rigveda, are Sindhu (Indus), the Vitasta (Jhelum), the Asikini (Chenab), the Parushini (Ravi), the Vipac (Beas), the Cutudri (Sutlej) and the Sarasvati (Ghaggar). The last one, which was flowing through the then fertile plain of 'Cholistan' and providing the source of sustenance of life and route of migration to the Aryans, before joining the Sindhu, buried her head in the bosom of mother earth. This happened due to geological disturbances in the Himalayas which changed the routes of tributaries of the river Jamna from west to east, though goddess Sarasvati ascribed it to the shameful deeds of her sons. She left behind the mysterious Cholistan for us to explore and unearth the ancient civilization of Sapta Sindhvas.

Of the Sapta Sindhvas, the great Sindhu (Indus) has given the name 'India', to what is now constitute Pakistan. The modern India was known then as 'Bharat Varsh'. But where was then Lahore, which had witnessed the famous important 'Battles of Ten Kings' of the Vedic times? At the bank of Parushini, where it is situated now, or at Ohind on the bank of Sindhu near Attock? Or was it situated near Jalalabad on the bank of river Loghar in Afghanistan? We leave this question for future archaeologists to answer. We explore the antiquity of the 'Land of Seven Rivers'.

Geological History

The plain of Sapta Sindhvas, as well as the Gangetic plain, was once a sea — the Tethys Sea. This narrow shallow sea was bordered in the north by the Angaraland, i.e., the plateau of Siberia, and in the south by the Gondwanaland, i.e.,

the plateau of Deccan and Arabia. As is known now, the movement of the earth crust forced the Angaraland and Gondwanaland to move towards each other, compressing the rocks of the Tethys Sea into 'fold mountains'. The uplifting of the mountains took thousands of years, and the process is still continuing.

The Pamir Knot

An imaginary centre of these fold mountains is the Pamir Knot, which lies partly in Pakistan, partly in Afghanistan, partly in Tadjikistan and partly in China. From the Pamir Knot radiates the Himalayas, the Karakorum, the Sulaiman Range, the Hindukush, the Alai, the Tien Shan, the Altyn Tagh, and the Kunlun.

Of the 2400 km long Himalayas, the most impressive peak is 'Deomir' (8,125 m), erroneously called the 'Nanga Parbat'. It is situated at the great bend of the Indus in the Western Himalayas.

The Karakorum, meaning 'black gravel' in Turkish, running eastward from the Pamir Knot and almost parallel with the Western Himalayas, is 400 km. long. It has 100 peaks over 5500 m high within a radius of 160 km, with the towering 'Chogori' or King of the Mountains, popularly known as K-2 (8,611 m). Karakorum contains the world's greatest glaciers outside the sub-polar region. Some famous ones are: Hispar-Biafo 122 km, Siachin 74 km, Batura 58 km and Baltoro 58 km.

The Sulaiman Range runs south-west from the Pamir Knot and separates Pakistan from Afghanistan and the Indus valley from Baluchistan. The Hindukush running west from Pamir Knot, west of the Indus, is about 800 km long. Tirichmir (7692) crowns the range.

The Time Scale: Geological Sequence

Now let us have a look at the time scale or geological sequences to know the chronological background to measure the development of traditions and culture.

Origin of earth is estimated to be 4500 to 5000 millions of years. Its history is divided into Eras, Periods and Epochs. Life began on earth with the appearance of marine creatures some 570 million years ago in the Cambrian Period of Palaeozoic Era; but mammalian life appeared only 180 million years ago in the Jurassic Period of Mesozoic Era (beginning 230 million years ago). Mammals flourished in the subsequent period but became abundant particularly during Eocene Period (55 to 38 million years) of the Cenozoic Era (beginning 67 million years ago). The subsequent Epoch, Oligocene (37 million), Miocene (24 million) and Pliocene (10 million) have produced a wide variety of mammalian life.

The Pleistocene Epoch (2.5 million years ago) commenced with the first appearance of horse, elephant and buffalo. During Pleistocene five glacial stages are recognized between the years 600,000 to 11,000. This Great Ice Age has been studied extensively in Europe and the corresponding chronology of the sequence of plains and mountain glaciation has been established in the Potohar Plain, i.e., the area around Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. It is roughly bounded by the Pir Panjal foot hills of the western Himalayas in the north, the Salt Range in the south, the mighty Indus river in the west and the Jhelum and Poonch rivers in the east.

In this plain we find the well-known Siwalik formation with its fossils as the documents of history. Of the many important fossil finds of Siwalik the discovery of pre human form, *Ramapithecus punjabicus*, is of crucial importance to the study of origin of man. Its fossil finds come from Chinji and Nagri layers of Upper Miocene and lower Pliocene. Their absolute age is 12-9 million years. *Ramapithecus* forms an important link in the ancestry of man. The sedimentation of Siwalik has been linked directly with the Second Glaciation of the mountains, which commenced 480,000 years ago and lasted some 100,000 years. The weather in the beginning was cold and wet, which gradually became warm, hot and dry with heavy rainy season.

The glacial and inter-glacial periods present well marked sequence in the plain of Potohar. The changing climate afforded all sorts of opportunities to plant and animal life and the man of stone age who was dependent on them. This stone age culture is known as 'Soan Culture' after the river which drains the plain of Potohar. The Soan Culture people probably kept themselves busy in fishing, hunting, trapping and food gathering.

The Soan People during the years 480,000 to 11,000 have left enough evidence in the form of their stone tools to conclude that they were 'very simple food gatherers' and lived in 'tropical and semitropical vegetation'. They climbed trees to gather fruits, seeds and nuts. They collected 'honey, insects, grubs and small animals and stored them in wooden receptacles'. They dug for roots and fished in the rivers near which they tended to settle. They used wooden tools, plain pointed sticks, digging sticks and clubs for killing animals. They constructed rude shelters of barks and leaves, but did not remain long at any one site. They were sparsely distributed. Soan people were not warlike, being aggressive only during rituals and when driven by fear.

From Prehistory to History

The period from 11,000 to 8,000 years todate constitutes the dark age in the history of man in Pakistan. Undoubtedly he was wandering, perhaps fighting for survival with intruders from west. Evidence of Middle Stellenbosch, Upper Clacton, Upper Stellenbosch, Upper Acheulian and Upper Clacton Cultures were found at

places from Potohar. Be as it may, but we have to wait for future explorers to tell us about this dark period.

The recent discovery in Baluchistan of pastoral settlements dating back 8,000 years from today has established without doubt that man in Pakistan was progressing. The Kot Diji Culture which flourished 5000 years ago, gave way to Harappan (Mohenjodaro/Indus) Culture 4500 years ago. These so-called Indus Valley Civilization people were well advanced in the field of agriculture and trade. The destruction of these civilized people is still a mystery. Perhaps they could not withstand the onslaught of barbaric invaders from the west? From this point on we have a history of continuous invasion.

1500-550 BC: Aryans tribes invaded Pakistan. These migrants from the Iranian territories formed the ethnic base of Aryana, encompassing Iran, Afghanistan and part of Pakistan. They have left little evidence of their culture other than the Vedic literature.

550-331 BC: Persian conquerors ruled over all the Aryana. Achaemenid emperors (Cyrus, Darius, etc.) ruled Pakistan, as their Hindush/Hind/Sindh province. They introduced coinage, patterned on Lydian system. With the passage of time indigenous coinage also developed.

328-326 BC: Alexander the Great conquered Aryana. Although he was a mere 'bird of passage' but he left deep impression on the culture of the area, beside setting a milestone in the history, from which absolute dating of early historical events of the subcontinent could be reckoned.

323-250 BC: Seleucids, the Greek successors of Alexander in east, like Seleucus Nicator, Antiochus I and Antiochus II, ruled Pakistan totally or partially. They lost eastern Satraps to Mauryas and the latter were expelled from the region by Bactrian and Parthian revolts. From 323 to 227 BC Mauryas, like Chandragupta and Ashoka, after taking the eastern Satrapies (including the territories of Pakistan) from Seleucus ruled and fostered Buddhism in the area. Rock inscription of Ashoka at Shahbazgarhi, and another near Mansehra on the Karakorum highway and many Buddhist stupas and sculptures at Taxila and elsewhere in Swat, the well-known 'Gandhara Art', is the evidence of flourishing Buddhism in the region. The punch-marked silver coinage is still a mystery. The Mauryan empire collapsed after Ashoka.

250-50 BC: Greco-Bactrian satraps like Diodotus, Euthydemus, Demetrius, Eucratides, etc., invaded Pakistan and ruled into the fertile plains of the Sapta Sindhvas. They spread Hellenic culture throughout Aryana. Latter invaders were transformed into Indo-Greeks, like Menander, Apollodotus, Hermaeus, etc. Record of 42 rulers was virtually provided by their fine coinage. They were over-run in stages by Scythian invaders.

100-5 AD: Sakas from Central Asia are chiefly known from their coins. They were expert at cavalry warfare. They occupied Siestan (Sakistan) and Taxila. Some of their better known kings are: Maues, Azes I, Azilises and Azes II.

5-75 AD: Another horde from Central Asia, the Parthians were next invaders. Their Indo-Parthian or Pahalavas kings, like Gondophares, Abdagases, Orthagnes, etc., displaced the Sakas in Siestan and Gandhara. They destroyed the last remnants of Indo-Greeks. Indo-Parthian kings are known chiefly from their coins. Perhaps Pathans of former Gandhara have descended from Parthians?

75-230 AD: Kushanas formed the third and greatest Scythic invasion. They originated from the Yue-Chi tribes from south-west China. Their kings like Kujula Kadphises, Soter Megas, Wima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huvishka, Vasu Deva, etc., were patrons of Buddhism. Their civilization flourished across the eastern boundary of Sapta Sindhvas. In the west they had relation with Roman empire.

226-642 AD: Sassanid, the Persian descendants of Achaemenid, overthrew Parthians, and then Kushanas in the Aryana. Local princes ruled under them. They have left ample historical record. Some of their well-known kings are Ardshir, Shahpur I, Shahpur II, Hormazd II, Peroze and Khusrao.

360-575 AD: Ephthalites, the so-called 'White Huns' of Turko-Mongol origin from Central Asia, spread like thunderstorm on the earth. They overran Bactria and Gandhara, humbled Sassanids, destroyed Kushanas civilization and left behind them a dark age. Some of the Ephthalite kings are: Heptal, Tormana, Mihira Kula, Napki Malka and Shahi Tigin. The Ephthalites were latter overthrown by Sassanids.

650-850 AD: Arabs came to this land of seven rivers via Siestan and Baluchistan from west and up the Indus valley from south. They brought a new faith to this area, which became firmly established. They conquered the southern region upto Multan, which was famous for the temple of Sun.

750-950 AD: Turki Shahis of Kabul or Kabulistan and latter Hindu Shahis of Ohind on the Indus were the masters of northern region. They came in conflict with the rulers of the neighbouring kingdom of Zabul or Zabulistan. The Turkish king, Subuktigin and latter his son Mahmud of Ghazna, also known as 'Mahmud-i-Zabuli' completely routed them first from Lahore on Loghar, driving them out of Kabul, latter from Lahore near Ohind and Nandana on Jhelum and finally from Lahore on Ravi. (I was always intrigued by the name of Zabul, Kabul and Khyber, which are associated with Jewish history).

977-1192 AD: Ghaznavid kings of Central Asian Turkish stock, descendant of Mahmud Ghaznavi, ruled the northern region, latter with their capital at Lahore on Ravi.

1193-1526 AD: Ghorids from western Hindu Kush replaced Ghaznavids. Muiz-ud-Din Muhammad Bin Sam, or Shahab-ud-Din, otherwise known as Muhammad Ghauri, founded the Pathan dynasty, which ruled through 34 kings for 333 years.

1526-1857 AD: Mughal descendants of Mongols of Central Asia like Genghiz Khan, Timur Lang, etc., replaced the Pathans. Babar defeated Ibrahim Lodhi and took possession of Delhi and later on of Multan. His descendants ruled not only the Sapta Sindhvas but whole of the Bharat Varsh as well for 331 years.

1857-1947 AD: The British, last of the invaders from the West came here in the guise of traders and through manipulation became the master. Unlike the others — Aryan, Iranian, Scythian, Parthian, Greeks, Turks, Mongols, Arabs, etc., who came, conquered and settled here, the British kept the Indian subcontinent as a colony. They harvested the riches of the land and sent them back home.

1947-Todate: The state of Pakistan was created by the efforts of many under the guidance of our great leader Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It consisted of two wings — the western and eastern. While the former encompassed the land of seven rivers, the latter was situated 1500 km away in the eastern region of Bharat, which since 1972, became the state of Bangladesh.

Historical Geography

Pakistan, the modern name of Sapta Sindhvas, has a very long history. But perhaps all of us are not interested in history books. Let us see the land, which itself is beautiful. It presents a constantly changing panorama of enchanting landscapes as one roams on it, from its horizontal coast line to vertical ascend to its loftiest peak Chogori, the King of Mountains.

Sindh:

Sindh drive its name from the Sindhu. It harbours the remnants of prehistoric people and their culture of Kot Diji and Mohenjodaro. Simultaneously, it has the prosperous metropolis of Karachi, the biggest inhabitation of human species of modern Sapta Sindhvas.

Baluchistan:

Baluchistan, the largest province of Pakistan, with its 8000 years old agricultural civilization, is still largely unexplored and underdeveloped. A road built from west to east — from Sibi to Dera Ghazi Khan through Dera Bugti — offers breath taking scenic views of prehistoric landscapes, where once roamed *Baluchitherium*, the largest mammal of world.

Punjab:

North of Sindh is Bahawalpur with its world famous 'Cholistan'. This huge desert stretching from west to east, was once booming with life and activities associated with the people of the Vedic age and even much earlier than those on the banks of holiest of all rivers of Sapta Sindhvas, the Sarasvati. But when *Kaljug* or dark period appeared and the sons of soil engaged themselves in bad activities, mother Sarasvati feeling ashamed hid her face in the bosom of mother earth. The land became dry and barren. The people of *Kaljug* moved to the east. There the people are still doing bad things and defiling mother earth with atomic bomb, but mother Sarasvati is long dead.

The largest populated province of the Punjab, which was carved by Raja Ranjit Singh of Lahore out of the declining empire of the Mughals in 1792, at the time of his coronation and assuming the title of "Maharaja Wali-rawan-e-Punjab" in 1812, was once the granary of Persia and Mesopotamia. It had flourishing cities and trade centres like Harappa. The innumerable but largely unexplored archaeological sites invite scholars to unravel its untold history. Its people, under the leadership of Raja Paurava, a giant 6 feet 9 inches in height, gave a tough fight to Alexander on the bank of Vitasta, when the Raja lost his son and Alexander his horse Boucephalus. A small village, Bukafra, near Jalalpur Sharif, is still extent at that site. In Tulamba, fighting with Mallis, Alexander almost lost his life, but for the shield of Peucestas and the fighting of Leonatus. In Taxila, the Raja Ambhi offered Alexander a gift of 1,000 well fed bulls and 10,000 sheep for the feast of his army. Later on, King Ashoka on conversion to Buddhism stopped the killing of all animals. Taxila was an important settlement on the pilgrimage route of the Chinese in the past. Perhaps a gift of heavy mechanical complex by the Chinese people is a tribute to Lord Buddha?

North-West Frontier Province:

North-West Frontier Province, so named by British to the area which was once Gandhara. To them it was a frontier with or against the power of Tzarist Russia then. The power of Tzars faded long ago and the super power of Soviet Union collapsed, but we still have the frontier. Against whom? From Peshawar, an antique metropolis and heart of the province, one can go to Chitral, Dir, Swat, and Kaghan valley.

From Mansehra, where King Ashoka in 3rd century BC ended his journey of peace near the base of Bareri Hills and left one of his rock edicts, one can enjoy the drive on the Karakorum Highway (KKH) after examining it. From here on, the panoramic view of Batgram, which lies at the slopes of Black mountains, forces one to stop to enjoy the scenic beauty of nature. The winding road provides new views of constantly changing mountain-scape till Thahkot on the Indus. Here we are at the foot of Pir Sar, where Alexander had the fiercest of all fighting at Aornos.

Continuing the journey on the KKH one arrives at Besham Fort, an interesting place with real tribal touch and a flourishing bazar now. As one travels on the KKH towards Chilas, one wonders and admires the human endeavour for conquering the unpenetrable Indus gorge. The Chinese traveller, Fa Hsien, coming to the Land of Seven Rivers (339-414 AD) wrote that "....the party journeyed.... over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road, the side of the mountain being like a stone wall 10,000 feet in height. On nearing the edge, the eyes become confused, and wishing to advance, the foot finds no resting place. Below there is a river, named Indus. The men of former times had cut away the rock to make a way down, and had placed ladders on the side of the rock. There are 700 rock steps in all, and when these and the ladders have been negotiated, the river is crossed by a suspension bridge of ropes. The two banks of the river are somewhat less than eighty paces apart...." Now we do not have to complain or fear for anything. There is a road and fine bridges to cross the Indus — thanks to Chinese and Pakistani collaboration to build KKH. I am sure the soul of Fa Hsien and his companions must be happy. But what about the Kohistani people who opposed the obliteration of the foot prints of their forefathers who cut the rock steps and trekked the dangerous path?

As one travels on KKH, one sees new settlements, buildings and shops, along the road — a sign of progress and betterment of the people — and the then unhappy and angry Kohistani are happy now. Chilas, the headquarter of the new district of Kohistan has progressed very rapidly. Chilas, according to Professor Dani, "is the biggest natural museum of rock inscriptions", left by the scholars and artists of the Sapta Sindhvas.

From Chilas, along Sindhu, running through howling wilderness of arid mountains for about 30 km. one reaches a cluster of villages: Darot, Manot, Damot and Jaglot. After crossing the Sai or fairy river one gets the magnificent view of dominating Deomir¹ (8126 m), "the mountain of gods". Deomir, perhaps is comparable with Mt. Olympus of Greek mythology. We wrongly call this western peak of the Himalayas as Nanga Parbat — the naked mountain.

A few kilometers up from Jaglot, the KKH leaves Sindhu and runs north-west along Gilgit river. On approach to Gilgit one gets a reception from Dobani, a 6143 m peak of Karakorum. Further up, the KKH gets a thunderous ovation from the Hunza river as it leaves the canyon to meet the road which follows the course northward, when suddenly at a turn the south-western face of Rakaposhi (7790 m), the queen of mountains, appears. Bypassing Hunza, and wandering through "the most magnificent scenery that the eyes of man has ever looked upon", in the words of Durand, the British O.S.D. in Gilgit from 1889 to 1894, crossing the National Park and witnessing the real grandeur of bare and snow clad mountains, avoiding the

¹ Deomir is also spelt as Diamir.

wrath of 'Kala Pahar' and all the 'devils' which had caused the death of the passersby in former days, one finds himself at Khunjerab Pass (5000 m). This is the end of KKH. However, further north the road continues with a sign: China Drive Right.

Here we are at the Pamir Knot, the centre of the fold mountains. From these wonderful mountains originate the tributaries of Sapta Sindhvas and flow down south through and around Kashmir to sustain and maintain all activities of plant and animal life which are necessary ecological milieu for the 135 million inhabitants of this Land of Seven Rivers. One river has already buried her head because of the misdeeds of her son then, what are we doing now to let the remaining rivers of the Sapta Sindhvas to flow harmoniously and serenely from the mountains of Kashmir to the coast of Sindh ?

